

into consideration the evanescence of the diagnostic markings, and the inaccessibility of the coastal marshes where the bird breeds, together with the fact that the few ornithologists who seem to have visited them were generally armed only with cameras, it is perhaps not so odd after all.

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## THE SYSTEMATIC POSITION OF THE RING-NECKED DUCK.

BY N. HOLLISTER.

THE group of fuliguline Ducks now called *Marila* in the American Ornithologists' Union 'Check-List' has had its full share of nomenclatorial shifts and changes, and many schemes have been proposed for its division into genera or subgenera. It has always seemed to me that the question of the number and rank of the named super-specific sections within this group is of little importance in comparison to the error involved in the sequence given the species in the 'Check-List,' where the Canvasback is placed between the Redhead and the Scaups, and the Ring-necked Duck is put at the end of the series in the typical subgenus *Marila*.

From a study of the literature of American Ducks it is evident that the belief prevails that the Ring-necked Duck (*Marila collaris*) is a Scaup, very closely related to the Greater and Lesser Bluebills (*Marila marila* and *M. affinis*), and this error is fostered by the arrangement of the species in the 'Check-List.' One would indeed be led to believe from some accounts that the Ring-neck is not readily distinguished from the Lesser Scaup Duck (*M. affinis*)

and that the brownish ring on the neck and the gray speculum are the only important characters of differentiation. A long acquaintance with the Ring-neck in Wisconsin, where the bird is at times one of the commonest ducks killed over decoys, has led me to associate the Ring-neck in a general way with the Redhead rather than with the Scaups. A recent examination of all the species of the group in the National Museum collection convinces me that I have been correct in considering *collaris* much more intimately related to the Redhead than to the Bluebills, and that it is indeed a Pochard<sup>1</sup> rather than a Scaup. One of the principal characters in general use for the separation of a subgenus *Nyroca* in *Marila* is the virtually parallel-sided bill of most species of *Nyroca* as opposed to the slightly broader-tipped bill of typical *Marila* (the Scaups). In this character the Ring-neck is distinctly Pochard instead of Scaup, and its continued association with the latter is surprising.

The Ring-necked Duck is unquestionably the American representative of the Old World Tufted Duck (*Marila fuligula*), and the color of the speculum and the degree to which the birds are crested are the chief, although of course not the only, differences between them. Our Ring-neck is distinctly crested, the Tufted Duck has a complete crest, while a near relative in New Zealand (*Marila novaezeelandiae*) has virtually no crest at all. In coloration *collaris* resembles certain Pochards quite as much if not actually more than it does the Scaups. It is not infrequent that the generalized coloration of the females, which is a good indication of the close relationship, makes it difficult for the sportsman to be certain if a freshly killed bird be a small Redhead or a large Ring-neck. Aside from its blackish head the male Ring-neck in no way very much resembles a Scaup in coloration, while it has several of the characteristic items of color and color pattern frequently met with in Pochards of various species. The Pochards usually have reddish heads, but the brownish neck-ring in *collaris* is probably the remains of a once reddish neck and head in the species; one of the Asiatic Pochards (*Marila baeri*) sometimes shows a considerable patch of reddish color in its otherwise blackish-green head. In connection

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<sup>1</sup> I use Pochard as the English equivalent for *Nyroca* of authors as opposed to the name Scaup for species of typical *Marila*.

with this persistence of the reddish mark on the neck of the male *collaris* it is interesting to note that the brown ring is completely hidden in life when the Duck is in repose. In the National Zoological Park, where the birds may be watched at close range, it often requires continuous observation of a swimming male Ring-neck for a considerable period to get a glimpse of the collar, which is seen then only when the head is extended.

The elimination of *collaris* from the typical subgenus *Marila* would naturally bring up the question of the dismemberment of *Marila* into two or more genera, a problem which experienced ornithologists have attempted without happy results, or after long study have given up as impossible. Groups approximately equivalent to the *Nyroca* and *Marila* of the 'Check-List' have been recognized as genera by many authors, and recently the division of *Marila* into three full genera, *Nyroca*, *Marila*, and *Aristonetta*, has been advocated.<sup>1</sup> In effect of course this does nothing more than to raise the three subgenera of *Marila*, as recognized in the A. O. U. 'Check-List,' to the rank of genera. The Ducks of this group seem to me, considering all the known forms, so intimately blended as hardly to justify even subgeneric division. I am well aware that numerous "characters" may be found to divide them into groups, even to making several full genera; but such distinctions will always be a matter of personal opinion, and sometimes do not show sufficient concern for the apparent derivations of the forms. The genus *Marila* in an unrestricted sense is a fine example of a cosmopolitan, homogeneous group of birds, not large enough to be unwieldy — and why split it up? To be really consistent in such a division of *Marila* as has been suggested, the Redheads would have to be separated from *Nyroca*, as the type of this subgenus (*Marila nyroca*) differs as much in many features, and particularly in the form of the bill, from our Redhead and from *Marila ferina* (the type of *Aythya* Boie, 1822) as all do from the type species of the subgenus *Marila* (*M. marila*), which in turn differs very appreciably in the form of the bill from *Marila affinis*, the Lesser Scaup. As for "*Aristonetta*," I think that the European Pochard (*Marila ferina*) presents almost as perfect an intermediate, in the form and

<sup>1</sup> Oberholser, Proc. Biol. Soc. Washington, vol. 31, p. 98. June 29, 1918.

proportions of the bill, between the Canvasback and the Redhead as one could expect to find among distinct species in nature. It would seem to me just as reasonable to associate *ferina* and *valisineria* together in a group called *Aythya*, with the Redhead excluded, as to put *M. americana* and *ferina* together, leaving the Canvasback in a special genus of its own. Considering both color and structural characters, it would be difficult to say which species, the Canvasback or the Redhead, actually represents *ferina* on the American continent.

The next edition of the A. O. U. 'Check-List' will have two additions to this group, the Tufted Duck (*Marila fuligula*) and the European Pochard (*M. ferina*); specimens of both these species having been captured on St. Paul Island.<sup>1</sup> It seems to me that the birds should be arranged in this next 'Check-List' in the following order: Canvasback, European Pochard, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Tufted Duck, Lesser Scaup Duck, Greater Scaup Duck. Personally I do not see any way to separate *Marila* into valid genera, and I think the genus should be left without any subdivision at all; but if we must recognize intergrading subgenera or must have a distinctive name for every minor superspecific group, I hope that such divisions of *Marila* as are deemed necessary will not interfere with this apparently logical sequence for the species.

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<sup>1</sup> Evermann, *Auk*, Vol. XXX, p. 17. January, 1913.